



Indian Classical Literature: Negotiating Time And Translations' Frames

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Abstract: India's rich literary tradition is a deep reflection of the subcontinent's cultural evolution, encapsulating centuries of insight, spirituality, and myriad forms of artistic expression. These lineages, profoundly embedded in old philosophical and religious paradigms, have always invited global scholarly engagement. This article explores the development of Indian classical literature—from early ancient texts like the Vedas and Epics to the diverse and lavish literary heritages of Sanskrit, Tamil, and other regional languages. Through thematic exploration, this research reveals profound philosophical understanding within these works. Additionally, it critically evaluates how translation—especially under colonial and postcolonial hermeneutic lenses—has shaped international perceptions of these cultural artifacts.

Index Terms - Indian classical literature, religious traditions, cultural and spiritual heritage, translation studies, postcolonial critique, hermeneutics

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian classical literature offers a unique insight into a civilization spanning millennia. Far from being static relics, texts such as the Vedas, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, Upanishads, Sangam poetry, and Kalidasa's dramas are alive with deep wisdom and philosophical depth. This article argues that these texts are evolving markers of India's intellectual and spiritual development. It also emphasizes how translations—especially during and after colonial rule—have redefined their reception globally.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Reception Theory

Based on Jauss and Iser, this framework explains how translated Indian texts are received differently across cultural contexts. Their theories emphasize the reader's role in meaning-making, relevant to how Indian classics are interpreted in English.

2.2 Postcolonial Literary Theory

Scholars like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak critique the ideological manipulation of colonized literature. This section analyses how colonial translations restructured Indian texts to fit Western epistemologies and how postcolonial efforts aim to decolonize such readings.

2.3 Hermeneutics

The interpretive tradition of Gadamer and Schleiermacher is used to understand how meanings are generated from classical texts. Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons" is especially vital in interpreting Indian metaphysical and spiritual constructs.

3. Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology guides this research, incorporating:

Textual Selection and Thematic Analysis of Vedic, Sanskrit, and Tamil texts.

Comparative Translation Analysis of original vs. English translations.

Critical Reception Study analysing scholarly reception in English-speaking academia.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Indian Classical Texts and Knowledge Traditions

Themes like dharma, karma, moksha, and Atman-Brahman unity dominate the discourse. These concepts are woven into poetic, narrative, and dramatic structures that define Indian thought.

4.2 Role of English Translations in Global Comprehension

Translations, especially during colonial rule, were often interpretive rather than faithful. Terms like maya were diluted or exoticized. Contemporary Indian translators have aimed to restore authenticity and depth.

4.3 Colonial and Postcolonial Assessments

Colonial translations often served imperial agendas. Postcolonial theorists critique these translations and promote re-engagement through indigenous perspectives that restore ritual, cultural, and epistemological context.

5. Conclusion

Indian classical literature continues to shape India's spiritual and philosophical identity. The study reveals that translation and interpretation have played pivotal roles in shaping global understanding. While colonial translations popularized Indian texts, they also misrepresented many of their core elements. Postcolonial scholarship now aims to reinterpret these works with greater cultural sensitivity, ensuring their relevance for both academic and cultural continuity.

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